

Increase MAP results and Increase the number of students graduating with work readiness credentials

Focus on Testing and Accountability

If Missouri truly wishes to lead the nation and be competitive in tomorrow's global marketplace, it is imperative that our government, businesses, administrators, and parents investment in our children's futures. Investment can take on many forms. Therefore, a strategic plan that outlines short, medium, and long-term goals is necessary for defining, identifying, and allocating such investments. What are people willing to commit? This issue is not solely about raising taxes or cutting existing government services. Are politicians willing to take steps that are so far reaching that the fruits of their labor will not be seen until they are long term limited out of office? Are businesses willing to shoulder more of the remedial education burden bestowed upon them today v. yesteryear? Are schools willing to adapt their programs to the needs of the 21st century v. the 19th century model currently adhered to?

The business and industry group of the Education and Training (E&T) committee feels that in order to develop students to their full potential they must be exposed to a full curriculum. This includes testing these students in the four major areas of the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP): communication, math, science, and (physical education?). A number of the school districts within our state will not test in these four areas due to the lack of state funding. Somehow, someday we must find the funding so that all school districts are capable of delivering testing in these four areas across the state. Without a statewide mandate, the state will have a difficult time assessing the jobs school districts are doing due to the lack of comparative data.

Employers expect students to enter the workforce with a basic level of work-related skills. Unfortunately, their expectations have waned over the past decade and this results in apathy towards the [school] system. By no means does the business community mind investing in training programs that improve performance. From a taxpayer's perspective, return on investment is the impetus for their concern. Why should a business be responsible for teaching high school graduates basic math and reading literacy? What value to the community has a high school added with their diploma when nearly 30% of today's college freshmen are enrolled in remedial coursework? Firms need to commit their resources to moving forward—not looking backwards. The business group of the E&T committee believes that the state must adopt a standardized workplace readiness assessment tool (i.e., WorkKeys) to ensure that all graduates are capable of performing entry-level tasks.

No teacher can be excited to know that they will be judged by tests scores that are the result of unaccountable students. Therefore, incentives must be put in place for both students and staff to perform well. Students that score at or above the proficient level should receive predetermined mini-scholarships or some other form of monetary rewards.

Teachers and schools, likewise, should receive bonuses of sorts for assisting those students they are responsible for that perform at or above the proficient level.

Finally, technology changes so rapidly today that any teacher or counselor that has not taken an appropriate refresher course in the past 24 to 36 months is shortchanging our students, taxpayers, and community. After all, we must be willing to walk our talk...we constantly preach to our students the importance of lifelong learning. To that end, school districts have an obligation to ensure that all staff members are providing services that reflect the latest technologies. To do so, money remains an issue. These staff members need to know that their hard work will be recognized. The E&T committee recommends that staff and professional development training programs be made available and funded—especially in areas of need (i.e., IT and industrial technology). And, that upon completion of industry recognized certification programs these individuals are adequately compensated for their efforts inside and outside the classroom.

Establish a publicity campaign

If Missouri's leaders are truly committed to the *Focus on Testing and Accountability* strategy mentioned above, it would be necessary to garner support from various stakeholder groups throughout the state. A careful rollout of the means and ends should gather the buy-in required for successful implementation. This should include advertising—that more often than not deals with people's perceptions v. reality. Therefore, more properly termed a public relations campaign—rather than a publicity campaign—must be orchestrated.

A marketing team comprised of representatives from business, labor, government, and academia should develop and implement a marketing program that targets the various audiences within the community: students, parents, grandparents, etc. concerning the economic and educational virtues of adopting standardized academic and workplace readiness testing in today's global marketplace. These efforts must include town hall meetings, public service announcements, TV, radio, and print advertising, and possibly a Website. Once again, funding these efforts will prove to be the challenge.

In the short term, convincing the public that, ultimately, this group will be held accountable should win the long-term support necessary to measure this public relations campaign's effectiveness. Both quantitative and qualitative data must be collected and analyzed in order to do so. The business group of the E&T believes that in order to avoid any inkling of impropriety, a third party auditing firm should be appointed for this purpose. As usual, funding this piece will test our commitment towards excellence. Are we willing to walk our talk?

Devise Regional Development Plans

One size does not fit all! The State of Missouri is a diverse being—from geography to people to industry. Some areas are dependent on merely one or two aspects of the economy...while others thrive on multiple aspects and thrive on change. It is imperative that so-called models developed to encourage growth elsewhere be built with flexibility in mind. What's important to Rolla may not be on Cape Girardeau's radar screen. Therefore, success lies in the ability to coordinate efforts among and between regions.

The time has come where distinct groups learn to operate outside of their silos. With cuts in federal, state, and local funding, leveraging multiple resources is not an option for survival but a necessity. Local school boards along with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) must jointly develop and implement expected core outcomes in conjunction with the local Workforce Investment Boards and MTEC. To this end, the Regional Technical Education Councils (RTECs) may serve as good role models for acting as the fabric that ties the local to the state level while representing the diverse interests of the regional area. To avoid the appearance of adding more bureaucracy to an already seemingly ineffective system, the business group of the E&T recommends that careful consideration be given utilizing existing entities.

Finally, we must measure what we say we are going to do v. what we actually do. In addition, we need to reward those that meet or exceed established goals. Who measures and funds this piece remains to be seen. It seems that an entity not party to these functions will avoid conflict-of-interest issues regarding this matter.

ADDITIONAL ISSUES

Best Practices

The RTEC in SE Missouri is a fine example of business within the region supporting WorkKeys—the workplace readiness assessment tool mentioned above. A number of the larger employers in the area participated in the profiling piece and now require the assessment piece for those entry-level positions previously profiled.

The same RTEC has also overcome issues of union v. nonunion when it comes to training. Purchasing decisions are made jointly for the good of the industry. For example, when a laser shaft alignment tool for precision installation of equipment was needed for training purposes the RTEC purchased it and rotates the equipment between the various training facilities. In addition, Mineral Area College has implemented an Industrial Maintenance Mechanics certificate training program in the evening for all interested parties to attend. It takes about three years to complete. An AAS can be obtained by fulfilling general education requirements beyond the technical training.

The St. Louis Construction Tech Prep Consortium has sponsored a teachers/counselors “boot camp” for the past five years. Several union construction trades in the St. Louis

area have participated in exposing high school educators to what it takes to become a first term apprentice. Rarely, do they individuals come away without life altering experiences—with respect to their outlook on the possibilities of good-paying careers in the construction field.

The St. Louis Carpenters Joint Apprenticeship Program (CJAP) has entered into several articulation agreements over the past decade. With employers fighting for the same pool of labor graduating from high school, the CJAP saw a need to provide credit to students that come to their door with previous documented experience. Graduates from Rolla Technical Institute to Lewis and Clark Career Center to North County Technical High School and beyond are eligible to enter the CJAP with advanced standing—thusly, shortening the time for them to earn journey-level wages and benefits. In addition, the CJAP offers its US-DOL BAT approved graduates pathways into higher education. Both traditional and online AAS and Bachelor's degrees are available for those that wish to enhance their employability. Our goal is to have an MBA in Construction Management available online by fall 2004. (Unfortunately, most of these programs start outside our state's borders due to protectionist attitudes.)

The CJAP has partnered with it local high school just miles away in order to save money on equipment. Affton High School (AHS) recently installed a state-of-the-art computer lab and was contemplating upgrading its welding facility to meet EPA and OSHA standards. In the meantime, the CJAP was installing a state-of-the-art welding facility and was contemplating upgrading its computer lab to meet the demands of the industry. Upon discussing these matters with the school district's superintendent, they came to the conclusion that it would be better to—divide and conquer—share facilities than spend the extra monies. Now students from both groups are afforded the opportunity to learn in cutting edge environments.